



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, July 27, 2004

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Town Manager noted that Mayor Watson and Councilors Kolnaski and Wright would not be present, and he suggested the Committee nominate a chairman pro-tem.

A motion was made by Councilor Skrmetti, seconded by Councilor Bond, to nominate Councilor O'Beirne chairman pro-tem.

The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Pro-Tem O'Beirne called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti

Members Absent: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski and Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

None.

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Councilor Bartinik recognized Dick Gudis so that he could address the Committee of the Whole. Mr. Gudis thanked the Committee for allowing him to speak, noting that he will be out of town next week. A number of years ago, Mr. Gudis suggested the Town build a boat ramp in the Esker Point parking lot. Recently he learned that the project has been changed to a platform that will allow the launching of kayaks rather than small, motorized watercraft. Mr. Gudis suggested that the project be canceled and the money returned to the state. Mr. Gudis stated he has a problem with the Parks and Recreation Department, citing concerns with the department's productivity. Lastly, Mr. Gudis expressed disappointment that Ed Ettinger was not appointed to the Permanent School Building Committee.

Councilor Billing asked the Town Manager about the status of the Esker Point project. Town Manager Oefinger indicated he was not aware of Mr. Gudis' proposal, but he is aware of the application to OLIS on March 8, 2001. Funding was approved in May 2001, with various approvals (Corps of Engineers, DEP, Noank Zoning, and contract extension) following. Construction is scheduled to begin in September. The Town Manager read the project description from the original application, noting that it has not changed at all.

Councilor Skrmetti asked for a listing of small boat launches in Town and Councilor Sheets asked

for a corresponding map. This item was referred to the Committee of the Whole.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2004-0186 Postponement of Revaluation to 2006

Discussed

Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo explained there are three categories in the grand list. Personal property and motor vehicles are revalued every year; real estate is not. Previously, real estate was revalued every 10 years. After 1995, that was changed to every four years with a physical inspection every 12 years, and in the last legislative session, it was changed once again to every 5 years with a physical inspection every 10 years. Towns were also given the option of deferring the revaluation to 2006, which is a policy issue for the Council to decide. If the Council chooses to go ahead with the revaluation in 2005, a Request for Proposal will be issued this fall.

Councilor Sheets thanked Mr. Pandolfo for an exceptionally clear narrative. She reviewed the information found in Mr. Pandolfo's referral memo and the supporting analysis by Mr. Philip.

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Sheets, to recommend that the revaluation be postponed from 2005 to 2006.

Councilor Skrmetti expressed concern with delaying because it only postpones the "sticker shock." In the long run, Councilor Skrmetti would like to see annual revaluations and tax reform. Councilor Billing suggested that revaluation needs to be explained to the public better. She does not feel strongly about 2005 or 2006.

Mr. Philip explained how a statistical revaluation is conducted. It includes everything but measuring buildings and going through the houses.

Councilor Bond encouraged citizens to lobby for property tax reform if the Council chooses to delay the revaluation. Councilor O'Beirne prefers 2005 because of the fairness issue. After talking to the legislators last week, he does not feel there is any hope for tax reform in the near future.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 3 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond and Councilor Sheets
Opposed: 3 - Councilor Billing, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Skrmetti

Recommended for a Resolution

Councilor Bartinik indicated he does not see this as an important issue, stating it is unrelated to the larger issue of tax reform. Discussion followed on the failed motion, and the fact that by state law, the Council has to proceed with revaluation in 2005. The Town Manager stated that since this is a policy issue, he would prefer to have a motion approved by the Town Council.

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to conduct the revaluation in 2005.

Councilor Bond asked if the problems from the last revaluation have been worked out and Mr. Philip stated the issues are always the same. Councilor Bond suggested that postponing a year would allow the public to understand the process. Councilor Sheets explained her reasons for wanting to delay the revaluation. Councilor O'Beirne asked what the Assessor would do during that year if the revaluation were delayed. Mr. Philip stated that there would be nothing to do because there is an established process already in place. He then explained to the Committee how the process works. Councilor Skrmetti noted that staff previously conducted a thorough presentation on the revaluation process for the Council, and he does not feel that postponing will make the process any clearer. He noted that the Council could perhaps establish some ground rules for the process. Councilor Billing feels it will cost more to postpone, but she is more concerned with the process.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 4 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Skrmetti
Opposed: 2 - Councilor Bond and Councilor Sheets

2003-0177 Renovations & Additions to Groton School Facilities - Phase I**Discussed**

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider briefed the Council on the status of the project. A Request for Qualifications has been issued for architectural services and a number of proposals have been received. The Permanent School Building Committee (PSBC) has requested a short list of five firms. It will take about a month to interview, and then six to ten weeks to enter into contract. For the construction managers, staff will be proposing to the PSBC an agent or advisor form of construction management where major components of the project are put out to bid and the construction manager acts as general contractor.

Mr. Schneider indicated that he is working with Human Resources to develop a job description for a project manager for school construction, to be brought to the Council. The position is necessary to help manage the school project on a day-to-day basis. Public Works does not have staff that can assume these duties. The position will be responsible for administration of a number of contracts and oversight of financials.

The consensus of the Committee was to bring the job description to the Committee of the Whole. Councilor Bond asked if the position would be permanent. The Town Manager noted that the position will exist as long as there is a need for it. He further noted that there is money in the school improvement project budget for this position and associated project management costs.

2004-0246 Agreement for Right-of-Way Activities Associated with Mystic Streetscape Improvements**Discussed**

Director of Planning and Development Mike Murphy explained that the Town expects to get rights-of-way for this project at no cost, but DOT is requiring that funds be set aside based on a formula they have developed for calculating potential costs. DOT is requiring the Town to retain up to \$260,000, of which 80% is reimbursable by the state if it is used. If the funds are not expended, staff will work to get the money put back into the project.

A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Bond, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously.

2004-0247 Design and Construction Costs Associated with Mystic Streetscape Improvements**Discussed**

Director of Planning and Development Mike Murphy explained the request to update the resolution committing the Town to provide 20% of the design, right-of-way, and construction costs associated with the Mystic Streetscape Improvement Project.

A motion was made by Councilor Skrmetti, seconded by Councilor Sheets, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously.

2001-0072 Review of Ambulance Response and Responsibilities**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger updated the Committee on a management study being conducted by Fitch Associates for the two ambulance services in Town. The goal of the study is to establish base line information to determine how much funding should be provided by the Town. Both ambulance companies were sent a detailed survey in March, which they have only recently responded to. The Town Manager asked the Council to consider if withholding the monthly contributions to the ambulance services would be an acceptable method for assuring their cooperation with the study. He noted that the untimely responses may drive up the cost of the study.

Councilor Bond stated that withholding funding is inappropriate, but she would support putting them on notice that it could happen in the future. Councilor Billing and Councilor O'Beirne concurred and expressed support for providing written notice and even inviting them to appear before the Council.

At the request of Councilor O'Beirne, Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief update on the Shennecossett Golf Course study. Staff has received a rough draft of the study, and it will take approximately six weeks before the document will be available for public review.

2003-0228**Navy Housing Privatization****Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief history on the proposal to privatize approximately 2100 Navy housing units in Groton. He has learned that the company has never been involved in a privatization project where the units were located off base, which means there is no previous experience to draw from and information has not been forthcoming. The Town Manager has fully engaged the Town Attorney, Eileen Duggan, on this issue. The privatization company has indicated they need to submit their proposal to the federal government by August 9th. The Town has also discovered that these units are not taxable. There have been some discussions about PILOT payments, but they could potentially jeopardize federal funding for schools. The potential tax revenue associated with the structures is around \$1 million, but the Town doesn't want to jeopardize \$5 or \$6 million in school aid. The privatization firm has indicated they are interested in contracting out for services. The Town may provide certain services for a fee, but not PILOT funds. Town Manager Oefinger explained that the privatization firm would hold a 50-year lease of the property, with the assets/buildings being turned over to the LLC, and the Navy retaining ownership of the land. The theory is that the housing can be improved at a quicker rate. The group will demolish the units and rebuild approximately 1800 units in stages. The Town Manager will try to get a copy of the proposal submitted to the Navy and he suggested that the Town Attorney can make a presentation to the Council in the future if so desired.

2004-0238**Ciccone Request to Purchase Town Land - Flanders Road/Route 1****Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted that Mr. Ciccone approached the Town about acquiring a piece of Town-owned property that was acquired through foreclosure about 60 years ago. Town staff has not identified any reason to retain the property except for a portion for road radius. However, with the recent discussions about extending water and sewer up Flanders Road, the property could potentially be used for a new pump station, which has put Mr. Ciccone's request on hold. Mr. Ciccone has eliminated the setback encroachment that prompted him to try to acquire the property, so he is willing to wait for a future determination regarding the property. Town Manager Oefinger showed the Committee a sketch plan of a potential pump station that was developed by Public Works. Normally the Town Council doesn't get involved with parcels acquired through foreclosure, but because this property has been held by the Town for so long, the Town Manager feels it would be better to follow the procedure for disposing of Town-owned land.

2004-0245**Televising Committee of the Whole Meetings - Review****TELEVISING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETINGS - REVIEW****Recommended for a Resolution**

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to recommend a resolution continuing the broadcasting of Committee of the Whole meetings.

Shawn Greeley was asked about the impact of going to one camera, and the impact on scheduling. Mr. Greeley noted that scheduling has not been a problem because the broadcasts fall in line with the regular Council meeting broadcast schedule. There is an issue with special meetings because more programming is eliminated to accommodate the longer meetings. There is a definite difference in

quality using only one camera, but it is acceptable. Additionally, only one camera has created some technical issues that have had to be dealt with. Mr. Greeley noted that he has received positive feedback regarding the broadcasts. Councilor Billing asked about the costs involved, and Mr. Greeley noted the costs on average are comparable to televising Town Council meetings using two staff members. The new arrangement has had some impact on the availability of staff to offer services to other agencies (i.e. studio time).

Councilor Billing has noticed that non-televised meetings are more informal and discussion is freer, which is a down side to televising the meetings. However, the up side is allowing the public to see the discussions.

Councilor Sheets has had numerous calls in support of the practice.

Town Manager Oefinger encouraged the Committee to continue the practice of televising regularly scheduled meetings only. Councilor O'Beirne noted that the policy does not preclude televising important special meetings. He agreed that the practice has changed to tenor of Committee of the Whole meetings.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 5 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti
Opposed: 1 - Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2003-0288 Town Council Goal Setting

Discussed

The Town Manager distributed an updated summary based on the last goal setting session. Councilors indicated they would review the document and asked that the referral be placed on the next Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

2004-0207 Town Manager Annual Evaluation

Discussed

A copy of the previous evaluation sheet used by the Town Council was included in the agenda packet. Councilor O'Beirne noted that the Council has historically asked the Town Manager to provide a listing of personal achievements and major staff achievements as a self evaluation. He suggested that if Councilors want to change the evaluation form, it should be done for the coming year, not retroactively. Councilors O'Beirne and Skrmetti expressed support for the current evaluation process, which also involves setting the Town Manager's salary. Councilor Bond asked for a copy of the Town Manager's self evaluation from last year. Discussion followed on the Town Council establishing goals for the Town Manager. Councilor O'Beirne suggested a referral to Committee of the Whole on the annual evaluation process for the Town Manager and Town Clerk. The Town Manager explained that the evaluation form is similar to the one used for non-union employees and bullet items are examples only. Councilor Billing expressed concern with the staff development section and the Council's ability to evaluate the interaction between the Manager and his staff.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent distributed adopted budgets.

Councilor Bond requested a referral to the economic development committee to look at tax abatements and tax incentives. Discussion followed on the need for a referral.

Councilor Billing requested a referral to Committee of the Whole to discuss revaluation process.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to adjourn at 9:37 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.